



## State of Montana Project Management Office

### *Project Initiation and Planning Phase*

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## End of Initiation Phase Checklist Instructions

This is a checklist of activities and deliverables that should be completed by the end of the Initiation Phase of a project. This checklist can be used during an end-of-phase management review or simply used by the Project Manager and team. This is one of a series of end-of-phase checklists, one for each of our representative project phases.

The theme of an end-of-phase management review is to ensure that sufficient work has been completed in the current project phase to allow the project to enter the next phase without an unacceptable increase in project risk. Thus, the checklist is not only for what work was done in the last phase, but also for what foundation has been set for the work that is coming next. Projects that don't lay a good foundation in risk reduction activities such as planning, requirements management, design and testing can become overextended in later project phases, increasing the schedule time, cost, and risk of the project, and decreasing the fitness for use of the project's result. A checklist that tracks the status of key activities and deliverables in each project phase can help the team and stakeholders decide if a sufficient foundation has been laid in the current project phase to allow the project to continue into the next phase.

The Initiation Phase (or "Investigation and Planning Phase") is where a fully-represented cross-functional team fleshes out the project definition via detailed requirements, makes major design or project approach decisions, completes an economic analysis of the costs and benefits of the project (updated business case), and creates detailed plans for time and resources. Reviews at the end of the Initiation Phase approve the project to go into full development to execute the rest of the project – and that approval needs to be based on a sound understanding of detailed goals and agreements on costs, time and resource commitments.

1. If you are at the beginning of your project, download this checklist and the other end-of-phase checklists and use them to make the general plan for the entire project. If you are in mid-project, examine the checklists of previous phases to ensure that your project is not already overextended. Try to avoid examining these end-of-phase checklists late in the project phase or on the eve of the end-of-phase project review -- they lose much of their value as a planning tool if they are not used early.
2. Edit these checklists to remove items that don't apply to your particular project and to include additional items that are key gating items in your organization's development process. You can also adapt these checklists to your organization's project lifecycle phases (more on that below). Try to do this editing EARLY in your planning, when you're not under pressure to complete a particular phase. Then, hold the checklist steady both during and at the end of

the phase -- resist making changes and removing items in order to have a better review.

3. Don't be put off by the number of items on these checklists. For example, note that the term "plan" does not necessarily mean a formal document; it means your team has done some critical thinking in the subject area and has captured the results of that thinking into a plan that specifies activities and deliverables. The plan should be in some written form so that it can be systematically applied to the project over time without complete reliance on human memory. In some organizations, you can substitute "planning" for plan and show the results implicitly in other items like schedules. Or you may have a few paragraphs each for some of these "plans", captured in one general planning document. In other organizations, you'll want to show a more formal written plan or other auditable evidence that you've done the early critical thinking about the subject area.
4. Start actively using each checklist EARLY in the project phase to ensure completeness of the activities and deliverables that you are trying to accomplish during the phase.

As part of the end-of-phase review, the checklist should be prepared with either a "YES" or "NO" in the "Done?" column. Items with a "NO" are "punch list" items to be tracked until completion.

## **The Use of Project Phases**

Projects are typically divided into **Phases** that define logical divisions of the project work over time. Phases also provide the team and management with checkpoints for reviewing project progress and parameters, and determining whether to go further.

The project phase breakdown and names that we use are fairly typical, but by no means the only ones. If your project phases are broken up differently, you can adapt our end-of-phase checklists to your own development or project lifecycle methodology. For example, product development organizations might split the "Execution" phase into two distinct phases of "Design" and "Prototype and Test". Organizations with complex manufacturing may want to have two phases for "Delivery". Other industries may have completely different phases. The point here is that a project lifecycle should have periodic progress reviews where the work to date is examined and the risk of continuing with the project is assessed. Our end-of-phase checklists are meant to support these reviews.

To guide your use of this checklist and its possible adaptation to your own development model, the next section provides our definition of the Initiation Phase.

## **Initiation Phase**

The key words of the Initiation Phase are investigation, tradeoffs and planning. During this phase, the preliminary business case is fleshed out into enough detail to make a go/no-go decision on committing significant resources to full development. To make

that judgment, the team must do some amount of high level 'design' work to determine exactly what product or system or other 'project deliverable' should be developed to meet the customers' needs and what that could cost, to complete the financial picture. Typical deliverables supporting this business case include a Return on Investment analysis, a high-level design and results of design reviews, a resource plan and a milestone schedule. At the end of the phase, the team uses this checklist, reviews project deliverables and, with management, determines whether or not to proceed with the project. Typical major areas of work during this phase include:

**Project Definition and Requirements:** Based upon the customer needs defined in the Concept Phase, the team creates Project Objectives or Project Vision documents to clarify what will give the customer most value, set requirements priorities and overall project scope.

**Team and Communication:** The team sets up its communication mechanisms, such as team meetings and action item lists, and clarifies responsibilities as the project plan is developed.

**High-Level Designs and Reviews** The team investigates high-level design alternatives that would meet the project vision and functional requirements, evaluates risks in each design alternative and holds reviews of the alternatives and their impact on project timing, costs, and risks. (They may perform early development work that will be taken on to the next phase or create prototypes for risky areas.)

**Planning, Scheduling, Estimating, Costs and Risks:** As they evaluate alternatives, they assess the scope of the project schedule and the budget needed to implement each approach, the cost of the product, project risks, and possible tradeoffs in functionality to reduce those risks, time or costs. As the desired project alternative becomes clearer, the team shifts to planning and estimating remaining project tasks in more detail and generating a project schedule and cost estimates.

Note that for projects involving development uncertainty, work may be done iteratively starting in the Initiation phase. The schedule developed in this phase will be solid for the next 1 or 2 requirements/design/implementation/test iterations to be done in the Execution (Development) Phase, but will need updating for further iterations once the first iterations are completed. Thus, Execution-Phase design work may be required before all schedule details can be fully worked out and the end date considered firm, but the Initiation Phase schedule must give management a good enough idea of project scope and cost to decide whether to proceed with the project.

Note also that for small, short projects, this phase may proceed very rapidly with fewer alternatives to investigate because the scope is well understood. Regardless, the key steps apply:

- Understand the customer's need through a Vision and detailed requirements,
- Create and review a high level design,

- Determine the rest of the schedule,
- And get approval to proceed.

## Using the Initiation Phase Checklist

As we stated in the Introduction, the purpose of an end-of-phase checklist (and accompanying management review) is to ensure that sufficient work has been completed in the current project phase to allow the project to enter the next phase without an unacceptable increase in project risk. Thus, the checklist is not only for what work was done in this phase, but also for what foundation has been set for the work that is coming next. Projects that don't lay a good foundation in risk reduction activities such as planning, requirements management, design and testing can become overextended in later project phases, increasing the schedule time, cost, and risk of the project, and decreasing the fitness for use of the project's result. A checklist that tracks the status of key activities and deliverables in each project phase can help the team and stakeholders decide if a sufficient foundation has been laid in the current project phase to allow the project to continue into the next phase.

The contents of the Initiation Phase Checklist help ensure that the major project parameters – scope, cost, time and quality – have been adequately defined and reviewed, and the company still believes that there is a sound business case for the project as defined. Only then should the project proceed significantly into the much more complicated and costly subsequent phases.

A caveat regarding the use of end-of-phase reviews and checklists in general: In some cases, all activities and deliverables may NOT be completed at the end of a project phase. The goal of a gating end-of-phase management review is not to rigidly enforce a waterfall development methodology where everything must be completed, approved and signed off before any activities in the next phase can begin. There can be overlap between phases and as much concurrency as possible without exposing the project to unacceptable risk. The point of the gating review is to examine the state of the current phase's activities and deliverables and measure the risk of overextending the project by moving the center of effort of project activities heavily into the next phase at this point in time.

The critical aspects of transitioning from the Initiation Phase into the Execution Phase are:

- Having the team aligned on a project definition—the major goals and constraints of the project—and on high level 'designs' before massive development or implementation work occurs.
- Ensuring that the more detailed business case has been fleshed out sufficiently in the Initiation phase to know that the project approach is financially sound.

If there is an Initiation Phase activity or deliverable that has not been completed by the end-of-project review, the team and stakeholders may make a consensus decision that

there is no severe risk in allowing the project to continue into the next phase as long as the activity or deliverable is completed in a timely way and scheduled to be completed before its absence would raise risk.

If this case can be made for the item, then enter a “NO” in the “Done?” column and enter the item’s completion date in the “Due Date” column. This activity or deliverable is now considered to be on the “punch list”, a to-do list of activities that the project manager recognizes as exceptional—a carefully controlled overextension of the project. These items must be carefully tracked to closure before the end-of-phase review can be considered fully complete. The project manager takes an action item from the end-of-phase review to track each item on the punch list and report the closure of each item. One mechanism for doing this is to amend the review minutes as each punch list item is closed out. Progress on the punch list should be reported regularly and frequently. The review is not considered complete until the punch list has been cleared.

## **End of Initiation Phase Checklist**

Add your own explicit items or wording as needed. This particular list shows the kinds of items that can be checked for hardware/software development projects. You can edit this list to refer to specific project documents or key activities involved in reviewing project deliverables prior to transitioning to the Execution Phase. Be sure to include the critical items that should gate moving to that next phase, where the project team ramps up and increasing amounts of money are spent developing the project deliverables.

## Administrative Information

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